

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 18, 2005

DUTCH BILL CREEK SEDIMENT CONTROL PROJECT

File No.

Project Manager: Jim King

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$135,000 to the Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District for implementing projects to reduce sediment delivery to Dutch Bill Creek in western Sonoma County for the purpose of improving anadromous fish habitat.

LOCATION: Dutch Bill Creek, Russian River watershed, western Sonoma County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location Map

Exhibit 2: Watershed Map

Exhibit 3: Project Support Letters

Exhibit 4: Mitigated Negative Declaration

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-270 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred thirty-five thousand dollars (\$135,000) to the Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District (“RCD”) for implementing projects to reduce sediment delivery to Dutch Bill Creek in western Sonoma County for the purpose of improving anadromous fish habitat, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to disbursement of funds, the RCD shall submit for the written approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer a work program, budget, names of the contractors it intends to employ for the project and a signing plan acknowledging the Conservancy and Proposition 12 funding;

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2. The RCD shall ensure that signs acknowledging Conservancy and Proposition 12 funding are installed at the project sites in the manner approved by the Conservancy's Executive Officer."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the Negative Declaration prepared and adopted on June 16, 2004 by the Department of Fish and Game, attached as Exhibit 4, and finds that there is no substantial evidence that the projects will have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382.
4. There is no evidence before the Conservancy that the project will have a potentially adverse effect either individually or cumulatively, on wildlife resources as defined under California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2.
5. The Conservancy has on the basis of substantial evidence rebutted the presumption of adverse effect contained in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 753.5(d) regarding the potential for adverse effect on wildlife resources as defined under California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This authorization would provide up to \$135,000 to the Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District (RCD) for implementing projects to reduce sediment delivery to Dutch Bill Creek in western Sonoma County, an important lower Russian River tributary that provides habitat for steelhead trout and coho salmon. The proposed projects arise from a 2002 assessment performed by the RCD with Department of Fish and Game (DFG) funds that identified and prioritized actions for eliminating major sources of sediment released in the watershed. The Conservancy request for funding represents about 21% of the total project cost with the balance of funding being provided through DFG's Fisheries Restoration Grant Program. In-kind services, valued at approximately \$14,000 will be provided by property owners.

The RCD proposes to implement erosion control and erosion prevention projects at 139 sites located on nine private parcels. The work would include replacing old culverts with new culverts designed to accommodate a 100 year storm event, installing critical dips at stream crossings, installing new ditch relief culverts, installing rolling dips to minimize erosion from roadbeds, filling inboard ditches and out-sloping road surfaces, and armoring culvert outfalls where appropriate. The work would address some 11.2 miles of road. While approximately 89% of the total miles would be upgraded, 1.23 miles of road

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would be decommissioned. The project is expected to achieve an estimated 25,240 cubic yards of total sediment savings. Ten miles of road in the watershed received similar treatment in 2002. Combined, these projects would largely achieve the sediment reduction goals identified in the 2002 study. With the experience gained in 2002, the RCD is prepared to proceed with the proposed work during the 2005 dry season. Agreements with property owners have been obtained.

Site Description: Dutch Bill Creek is an 11 square mile tributary to the Russian River located in western Sonoma County in the river's lower watershed (Exhibits 1&2). The small rural towns of Occidental and Camp Meeker are located in the watershed. The watershed has a diversity of land uses including cattle grazing, commercial vineyards, logging and rural residential uses. Dutch Bill Creek is one of two Russian River tributaries found to have rearing juvenile Coho salmon in summer 2002 and steelhead trout are routinely found in the stream.

Most ownerships in the watershed range from ten to eighty acres with several larger holdings exceeding 200 acres. The County General Plan and zoning severely limit subdivision. Dutch Bill Creek and its small tributaries are designated under Sonoma County's General Plan as "riparian corridors" and as "scenic landscape". The rural character of the watershed is likely to be maintained in the future. However, more intensive land uses and the extensive network of unpaved private roads in the watershed contribute to erosion and loss of habitat with the result that key fish species such as Coho salmon and steelhead trout are perilously underrepresented in Dutch Bill Creek as in the larger Russian River watershed.

Project History:

The Coastal Conservancy has worked in support of western Sonoma County natural resource protection and enhancement for many years with many public agency partners and community interests. Notable work products include preparation of the Sonoma County Coastal Wetlands Enhancement Plan, (1987), the Russian River Enhancement Plan (1994), and, more recently, the Sonoma Coast Grazing Management Plan, (2003). The Dutch Bill Creek proposal arises in large part from the focus given to the creek in the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon (2004) that recognized the contribution of the small subwatershed to Russian River watershed fish populations. Since its publication last year, the Conservancy has engaged with DFG, the RCD and other community interests to develop ways to meet the objectives of this report and other initiatives that preceded it. The RCD has extensive experience working with landowners in the watershed and the region, dating back to its inception in 1941.

Populations of Coho salmon have been nearly extirpated from the Russian River watershed. Recent multi-year surveys have found specimens in only three Russian River tributaries, Green Valley, Mark West and Dutch Bill Creek (2002). Dutch Bill Creek contributes steelhead trout to the Russian River system as well. A 2001-2002 DFG/RCD

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study of the Dutch Bill Creek watershed developed a body of information that resulted in substantial work in summer 2002 supported by DFG's fishery restoration program and the current proposal also supported by DFG. This recent effort provided funds to the Gold Ridge RCD for initial planning for habitat improvement in the watershed, for in-stream projects to improve fish habitat and for a first phase of erosion control and road improvements on lands adjacent to those addressed in the current proposal. Ten miles of road upgrades and decommissions have been accomplished under the program. The proposed work was approved for partial funding support from DFG under its 2004-2005 Fisheries Restoration Program. With Conservancy assistance, the project should achieve the goals presented to the Fish and Game Commission two years ago.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$135,000
California Department of Fish and Game	<u>499,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$634,000

Funding for the proposed project is expected to come from Proposition 12 funds designated for salmon habitat purposes. The authorization is consistent with the funding source as the project will provide Coho salmon, and other anadromous fish as well, with improved habitat by arresting erosion that results in sedimentation of spawning gravels and deterioration of rearing habitat.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270 et seq.) as follows:

Pursuant to Section 31251, the Conservancy may award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources which, because of human-induced events, or incompatible land uses, have suffered loss of natural and scenic values.

Pursuant to Section 31251.2, "in order to enhance the natural or scenic character of coastal resources within the coastal zone, the Conservancy may undertake a project or award a grant ... to enhance a watershed resource that is partly outside the coastal zone...". This section also requires the support of the Department of Fish and Game. As a chief funding body for the Dutch Bill Creek program, the DFG supports the Conservancy providing assistance to the RCD. A letter of support from DFG is included in Exhibit 3.

Pursuant to Section 31252, the proposed project is consistent with the Sonoma County Local Coastal Program as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below.

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Pursuant to Section 31253, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project. Consistent with this section, the proposed authorization provides approximately one-fourth of the total project cost with the balance provided by the Department of Fish and Game's Fishery Restoration Program.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The proposed project is widely supported by elected officials, public agencies concerned with natural resource management and members of the public. Letters of support are provided in Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The project is located outside the coastal zone in the lower Russian River watershed of western Sonoma County (Exhibits 1 and 2). Erosion and sediment control in the Dutch Bill Creek watershed is beneficial to the anadromous fishery of the local watershed as well as the entire Russian River watershed, both within and outside the coastal zone.
5. **Need:** Conservancy funds are needed to address a shortfall in funding for the Dutch Bill Creek sediment management program funded by the Department of Fish and Game. The proposed authorization will achieve the goals of the Coho salmon Restoration Strategy for this area.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The public trust value of California's salmon and steelhead populations transcends local watersheds, has intrinsic value, and value to sport and commercial fishing interests far beyond the watershed.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** Conservancy action will address a serious funding shortfall for the Dutch Bill Creek sediment control program allowing for full project implementation in 2005. Conservancy funding is urgently needed to meet the goals of the Coho salmon restoration strategy for the watershed.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** Road decommissioning and improved design of approved rural dirt roads will contribute to sediment reduction in watershed streams. The same work will also enhance upland and riparian habitat throughout the watershed by preventing soil loss, resulting in a more stable environment for native plants, less occupation by invasive plants and habitat development.

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9. **Readiness:** The RCD has demonstrated its ability to organize and successfully manage this work through identical effort in the Dutch Bill Creek watershed on neighboring watershed lands.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The proposed project is one of many that will contribute to achieving the Conservancy's goals for a healthy Russian River watershed, particularly as related to the fishery restoration strategy for the North Coast region. The proposed road decommissioning and re-design work is an essential upland counterpart to the Conservancy's fish barrier removal program.
11. **Return to Conservancy:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
12. **Cooperation:** The project represents a responsible collaboration between the Conservancy and the Department of Fish and Game to maximize the benefits of scarce resources. Cooperative overtures of support have been expressed by a number of community interests to assure the program is a success.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The Sonoma County Local Coastal Program (LCP), certified in 1981 and revised on August 3, 1999 identifies the need for public action and assistance to resolve existing problems in special resource areas including stream corridors that provide habitat for anadromous fish such as Dutch Bill Creek. Policies include protecting the biological productivity of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, and estuaries; special protection for species of biological and economic importance; and the protection and restoration of riparian areas.

Specifically, the proposed authorization is consistent with Sonoma County LCP Attachment "G", Environmental Resources Management Recommendations (10) and (12) that "require erosion control measures for projects effecting the riparian corridor" and provide for grading, excavation and other actions "... that will maintain the value of the area as a habitat for wildlife and aquatic organisms and is compatible with the continued viability of the habitat."

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA: In order to implement projects to improve fish spawning and rearing habitats through its statewide Fisheries Restoration Grant Program, the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) developed a Programmatic Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for all of its FY 2003-04 funded projects, including the proposed Dutch Bill Creek sediment control project. DFG approved the MND on June 16, 2004 and filed a Notice of Determination on July 7, 2004. The Notice of Determination and the MND for this project are included as Exhibit 4.

The project in the Dutch Bill Creek watershed includes replacing old culverts to accommodate a 100 year storm event, installation of critical dips at stream crossings, installing new ditch relief culverts, installing rolling dips, filling inboard ditches and outsloping road surfaces, and armoring culvert outfalls where appropriate. The MND prescribed site-specific conditions that must exist or be applied in order to avoid

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potentially significant negative effects on the environment. Through careful design, scheduling, and monitoring, DFG found that any and all potentially significant impacts associated with the Dutch Bill Creek project would be avoided or mitigated below a level of significance under CEQA.

Mitigation measures include: timing of work to avoid impacts to biological resources, including July 1 through November 1, or the first rainfall, for work in the vicinity of streams; roughly the same period for upslope work though sediment reduction activities are dependent on soil moisture and may be delayed on some sites until after July 1 to allow soils to dry adequately for equipment access; conducting surveys to determine presence of nesting or breeding birds or terrestrial animals and a further restricting of the construction timing as necessary to avoid impacts; regular removal of trash from the construction site to avoid attracting predators; adherence to work site best management practices to assure equipment and materials do not harm the environment; adherence to policies forbidding the spread or introduction of invasive exotic plants; demarcation of the work area to assure that access routes, staging areas, and the total area of disturbance is kept at a minimum; work site surveys for endangered, rare or threatened plant species prior to any ground-disturbing activities, and institution of protective measures, if necessary, as prescribed under DFG guidelines. If it becomes impossible to implement the project at a work site without potentially significant impacts to rare plants, then activity at that site will be discontinued.

Ground disturbance in the Dutch Bill Creek watershed is not expected to result in effects to cultural resources and no mitigation measures are included. However, the RCD and DFG will report any previously unknown historic or archaeological remains discovered at a site to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and comply with approved avoidance procedures. In order to avoid significant impacts to geology and soils, bare soil will be seeded, mulched and planted as necessary using best management practices and soil will be compacted to the extent necessary to reduce any surface erosion that may occur with the first heavy rainfall. Potential impacts from release of hazardous materials associated with heavy equipment operation will be avoided through use of standard measures detailed in DFG's adopted Mitigation Measures, Monitoring and Reporting Program. The RCD and DFG's Contract Manager will inspect the work site before, during, and after completion of the work action to ensure that all necessary mitigation measures to avoid impacts are properly implemented. DFG's adopted Mitigation Measures, Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project is included as Appendix B of Exhibit 4.

Upon its independent review of DFG's MND for the project, staff concurs with the DFG finding and recommends that the Conservancy find that the project does not have a potential for a significant effect on the environment as defined under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382, or on wildlife resources, as defined under Fish and Game Code Section 711.2. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination for this project.